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How Can Arts Leaders Play an Active Role in Cultural Planning Initiatives in Their Local Communities? (1)

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Introduction

In the spring of 2006, I was invited by Eugene, Oregon Mayor Kitty Piercy to chair a twenty-one-person Mayor's Cultural Policy Review Committee, along with Vice-Chair David Kelly (out-going Eugene City Councilor). The Mayor's Review Committee advised consultants, Marc Goldring and Claudia Bach of WolfBrown (<http://www.wolfbrown.com/>), as they conducted a comprehensive Cultural Policy Review on behalf of the City of Eugene.

My appointment to the Mayor's Committee was my first appointment to a citizen advisory committee charged with community cultural planning. At the time of my appointment, I was not working for a local community arts organization to which I had a particular allegiance, but I had previously worked as the Executive Director of the Jacobs Gallery (2). Because of this, I was well-positioned to understand the challenges facing Eugene's cultural sector as a visual arts advocate with connections to the city bureaucracy.

The Cultural Policy Review and Findings

The Cultural Policy Review (CPR) (3) was conducted from June 2006 to July 2007 and, while fairly comprehensive, was also formulaic in nature, surveying cultural policy as it relates to "the city" in three ways:

1. The current policies, including budget stream, expenditures, and support provided by the Cultural Services Division of the City of Eugene.
2. The general make-up of the arts and cultural sector in the community, including for-profit, nonprofit, and other public arts organizations.
3. The level and kind of community engagement in and support of the arts and culture organizations across the sector, whether public, for-profit, or nonprofit.

The Cultural Policy Review included:

- Stakeholder interviews with individuals and small groups
- Community meetings
- Cultural resource and engagement surveys
- A cultural facilities inventory, comprised from onsite visits and questionnaires
- An online cultural census

Throughout the CPR process, the consultants noted the “breath-taking” range and diversity of arts and culture in Eugene and noted with frequency the high level of community participation. Over 3,000 Eugene residents took part in one or more of the aforementioned data collection activities. Indeed, in the executive summary of the Cultural Policy Review Report ((Bach & Goldring, 2007), the consultants noted, “This planning process has been remarkably participatory. No other community in which the consultants have worked, no matter how large it is, has shown the degree of diligence and passion evidenced by Eugene residents and in particular the members of the Mayor’s Committee” (p. ix).

Early in the Cultural Policy Review process the consultants identified five key challenge areas:

1. Leadership and resources
2. Education and lifelong learning
3. Cultural organizations and artists
4. Audiences/participation
5. Downtown and the built environment

Once these challenge areas were defined, the Mayor’s Committee was eager to look at and consider these issue areas in more detail. The committee made a special request to the consultants to form working groups on how to best address the challenge areas in ways that would lead to a successful ten-year arts and cultural plan for the Eugene Community. The resulting vision for cultural development in Eugene, which is the foundation of the final Report of the CPR, defined five goals and sixteen strategies which directly address strengthening the aforementioned challenge areas.

Playing an Active Leadership Role in Cultural Planning

After participating in the Cultural Policy Review, I believe strongly that *arts leaders who want to play an active role in cultural planning must lead beyond the direct needs of and benefits to their organization’s narrow interests*. In order to do this, arts leaders must understand and engage with the broader political and economic landscape in which they operate.

Formalized cultural planning occurs very infrequently, and when it does occur, it requires participation from leaders who are intimately tied to specific organizations and affiliations. Often these organizations have funding and personnel constraints that require their leaders to adopt organization-centric leadership strategies.

In a cultural planning context, arts leaders are required to expand the focus of their attention to a broader vision that pre-supposes that the outcomes they are formulating will benefit the entire cultural sector and not merely their own organizations. This expanded leadership focus must remain intact through the implementation phase of planning as well as during the plan-formulation stage.

When called to act as a representative of a particular organization in the context of community-wide cultural planning, the role of each individual in the process is three-fold:

1. To represent a particular constituency within the cultural sector,
2. To act as an advocate for the cultural sector as a whole, and
3. To ensure the cultural sector's benefit to the community through planned improvement and growth.

At certain junctures, these three roles may seem mutually exclusive. I believe that if these objectives come into conflict, the role of the arts leader, in a cultural planning context, is to lead for the benefit of the entire cultural sector in their community.

The five identified challenge areas, identified in the Cultural Policy Review, are vast and require the attention of many individuals over time to address, but at the same time they are inter-related. As such, the one challenge area that transects all areas is that of leadership and resources.

Leadership Across Community Sectors

Through my work in the Eugene community, I have become acutely aware of the need for arts leaders to understand the municipal political structure and the economic political structure in which all arts and culture organizations operate. In order to lead effectively and build support for the entire arts and culture sector, arts leaders must:

1. Understand both the governmental structures and business ecology of their region, and
2. Create relationships with government officials and business leaders within and across various sectors.

For a novice arts leader and for the arts leader who is neck-deep in the day-to-day operations of her organization, this may seem daunting. In practice, it requires the willingness to learn about multiple strands within the community, to meet new people, and to create new relationships.

For me, the key to leadership is creating opportunity through relationship building across sectors. During the CPR, I served as facilitator for the Committee and served on the Leadership Team. This facilitation focused on the following:

- Setting the agenda for the Cultural Policy Review
- Moderating Committee meetings (4 to 6 hours long) and facilitating discussion amongst all twenty-one people on the Committee, the consultants, and the Mayor (8 meetings over one year)
- Strategizing opportunities for broad inclusion from across the community
- Attending, with the consultants, eighty percent of the public meetings and focus group sessions, where

critical data was collected

- Attending Leadership Team meetings, comprised of key city staff, the consultants, and the Mayor (20 meetings over one year)
- Participating in bi-weekly phone conferences with the Leadership Team

Managing complex dialogue and input required focused listening skills and attention to nuances in perspective and personality within a committee comprised of people representing diverse perspectives in the Eugene community ranging from visual artists, performing artists, arts managers, business people, tourism leaders, and at-large community members.

In addition to the direct facilitation of the CPR, I worked with David Kelly, the vice-chair, to build bridges across community sectors by:

- Meeting with the editorial board of the *Register Guard*, Eugene's local newspaper, and co-authoring a guest viewpoint piece for the paper about the Cultural Policy Review
- Meeting with each of the Eugene City Councilors to apprise them of progress
- Making a presentation about the work of the Committee to City staff at an all-staff Cultural Services meeting
- Addressing the local Rotary Club
- Cultivating a relationship with the President of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce
- Meeting with arts and business leaders in other communities who have gone through the same cultural planning process
- Keeping a close eye on the work of the City Council and the challenges facing the Eugene community

Engaging in these activities can be intimidating and can reveal personal deficiencies in knowledge, skills, and comfort level. For me personally, speaking to un-receptive groups is a challenge, but to lead effectively it's important that leaders hone their advocacy skills and interface effectively with elected officials, business leaders, and fellow culture sector workers. I have continued with this work because I believe that building a strong cultural sector requires active leadership across sectors for the mutual benefit of all community sectors and ultimately for the benefit of the individuals living in the community.

First Steps in Implementing the Plan

Shortly after the conclusion of the CPR, the Cultural Services Division of the City of Eugene convened a six-member Implementation Task Team, comprised of business leaders, artists, arts patrons, and arts administrators. The objectives of the Implementation Task Team were to:

1. Establish an "Alliance" for arts and culture that will coordinate and strengthen the efforts of the public, private and non-profit cultural sectors and foster high-level civic leadership in support of arts and culture.

2. Develop and fund a dedicated endowment or trust for Eugene's cultural organizations to increase public and private sector support for arts and culture.

To address these objectives, the Implementation Task Team has investigated other successful "Alliance" models across the country and has met with peers in other communities to seek advice and support. Along the way, we have invited the Chamber of Commerce to the table and the Chamber President asked to become a member of the Implementation Task Team, indicating a commitment to establishing an Alliance.

The Chamber's recent issue of "Open for Business" (2008) focused entirely on "The Business of the Arts" and the President's opening letter announced its partnership in:

Exploring ways to use the connection between business and the arts in order to:

- Support mutual economic and community interests
- Build the capacity of the arts sector
- Increase awareness of the benefits of the arts to our community's economy, education, and well-being
- Advocate for arts investment and participation among local businesses

Just as arts leaders *must lead beyond the direct needs of and benefits to their organization's narrow interests*, it's clear that leaders throughout our community recognize that the community that they live and work in benefits most when we all work together to ensure the livability and vibrancy of our community.

1. This question guides this article and is being used by permission of Dr. Patricia Dewey. Dr. Dewey formulated this as a guiding research question in her graduate-level Cultural Policy course in Spring 2007 at the University of Oregon. The students in the course used the Eugene Cultural Policy Review as an active case study around which to ground their research in cultural policy development. [[back to text](#)]

2. A private, non-profit, visual arts gallery operated in a public facility. <http://www.jacobsgallery.org/>. [[back to text](#)]

3. For more information see the City of Eugene's Cultural Policy Review page: http://www.eugene-or.gov/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=1677&parentname=CommunityPage&parentid=2&mode=2&in_hi_userid=2&cached=true [[back to text](#)]

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Tina Rinaldi is the Program Manager for the University of Oregon Arts & Administration Program, where she also teaches as adjunct faculty. Tina's arts management career began in 1987 when she co-founded the literary arts organization Poet's Reading, Inc. in Fullerton, California. Since then Tina has worked extensively for visual arts organizations in exhibition development, arts education, and executive leadership positions. Tina is currently a member of the Lane County Cultural Coalition, which distributes Oregon Cultural Trust grants at the local level and is a member of the Arts Foundation of Western Oregon Advisory Committee, which oversees distribution of several arts funds managed by the Oregon Community Foundation. Tina holds a B.A. with Honors in Art History and an M.A. in Arts Management from the University of Oregon.

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